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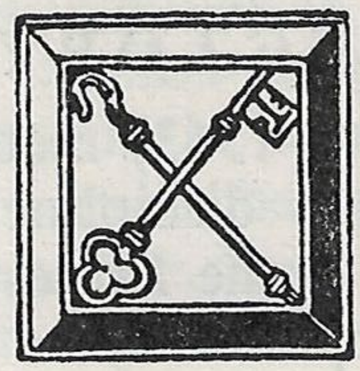
THE CREED of the COUNCIL OF TRENT

with explanations

Published by
THE CATHOLIC LEAGUE
L. G. FISHER, *Gen. Sec.*
40, Barnmead Road, Beckenham, Kent

PRICE 1/-

C.  L.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) met for the purpose of combating Protestantism and reforming the discipline of the Church. It dealt in detail with the doctrinal errors of the Protestant Reformers and with those abuses which gave them an opportunity to take root. At the conclusion of the Council the Profession of Faith known as the Creed of the Council of Trent (or Tridentine Creed) was formulated. Since the heresies of the sixteenth century still persist in various forms, the profession of the Tridentine Creed by all who hold the Catholic Faith still serves its original purpose.

A profession of faith has always been required at Baptism as a condition of admission to the Church; but this baptismal Creed has from time to time been expanded to meet new circumstances and heresies. Thus there is, e.g., the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the Tridentine Creed; but these later Creeds, while they develop or state more fully the contents of the original baptismal Creed, do not add anything to the essential truths of the first Christian Creed to be formulated.

The following explanations do not deal with the whole of the Tridentine Creed, but only with those parts of it which experience has shewn to be especially liable to misunderstanding.

THE CREED OF THE COUNCIL OF TRENT

The text of the Creed is as follows:—

I, N., believe and profess with a firm faith all and every one of the things which are contained in the Symbol of Faith which is used in the Holy Roman Church. (Here follows the recitation of the Nicene Creed.)

I. I most firmly accept and embrace the Apostolic and Ecclesiastical Traditions and all other observances and constitutions of the same Church.

II. I also accept the Sacred Scriptures according to that sense which Holy Mother Church has held and does hold, to whom it appertains to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures; neither will I ever take and interpret them otherwise than according to the unanimous consent of the Fathers.

III. I profess also that there are truly and properly seven sacraments of the new law constituted by Jesus Christ our Lord, and necessary for the salvation of mankind, though not all are necessary for everyone, to wit Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Order, and Matrimony, and that they confer grace, and that of these Baptism, Confirmation and Order cannot be repeated without sacrilege; and I also receive and accept the received and approved ceremonies of the Catholic Church used in the solemn administration of the aforesaid sacraments.

IV. I embrace and receive all and every one of the things which have been defined and declared by the holy Council of Trent concerning original sin and justification.

V. I profess likewise, that in the Mass there is offered to God a true, proper and propitiatory sacrifice for the living and the dead, and that in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist there are truly, really and substantially the Body and Blood, together with the Soul and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that there is a conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the Body, and of the whole substance of the wine into the Blood, which conversion the Catholic Church calls transubstantiation.

VI. I confess that under either kind alone the whole and entire Christ and a true sacrament is received.

VII. I steadfastly hold that there is a purgatory, and that the souls therein detained are helped by the suffrages of the faithful.

VIII. Likewise that the Saints reigning together with Christ are to be honoured and invoked, and that they offer prayers to God for us, and that their relics are to be venerated.

IX. I most firmly assert that the images of Christ, of the Mother of God ever-Virgin, and also of other Saints are to be had and retained, and that due honour and veneration are to be given them.

X. I also affirm that the power of granting Indulgences was left by Christ in the Church, and that the use of them is most wholesome to Christian people.

XI. I acknowledge the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Roman Church to be the Mother and Mistress of all Churches, and I promise true obedience to the Bishop of Rome, Successor of St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles, and Vicar of Jesus Christ.

XII. I likewise undoubtedly receive and profess all other things which the Sacred Canons and General Councils, and particularly the holy Council of Trent and the Oecumenical Vatican Council have delivered, defined and declared, and especially concerning the supremacy and infallible authority of the Roman Pontiff. And I condemn, reject and anathematize all things contrary thereto, and all heresies which the Church has condemned, rejected and anathematized.

I do now freely profess and sincerely hold this true Catholic Faith without which no-one can be saved. And I promise most firmly to hold and profess the same whole and entire with the help of God to my life's end.

"I. *N., believe and profess with a firm faith all and every one of the things which are contained in the Symbol of Faith which is used in the Holy Roman Church.*"

We may be asked why we should accept a Creed of which a considerable part was formulated by a purely Roman Council, i.e., a Council recognized only by the Western Church. Why may we not be content with an earlier Creed formulated by a Council recognized by East and West? The truth of a Creed does not depend upon its being accepted by all local churches, or even by a majority, but upon the authority with which the Creed is promulgated. When the Eastern Churches broke away from the Western or Roman Church true authority could no longer be validly claimed by both East and West. Truth cannot be divided; and where there is disagreement as to truth, the authority which is the guarantee of truth must belong to some one party; it cannot be divided among conflicting parties. In the case of the authority behind the Creed it remained with the Western or Roman Church from which certain local churches had broken away. This authority possessed by the Roman Church can be shewn to be the same authority which Christ our Lord willed to bestow upon His Church to preserve it from error in those truths concerning faith and morals which God has revealed to man in Christ our Lord. This will be dealt with more fully later on in these explanations.

"I. *I most firmly accept and embrace the Apostolic and Ecclesiastical traditions and all other observances and constitutions of the same Church.*"

The sources of Catholic belief are to be found in the words and acts of Christ our Lord during His life on earth. The recording of these words and acts in the minds of the disciples was the first step in the process of handing on Christian faith and practice. This handing on or tradition of Christian faith and practice reached another stage when it was embodied in the written word of the Gospels. Our Lord founded a Church and gave it powers to carry forward all that He had taught and shewn to the disciples who were contemporary with Him; He did not leave behind Him a book of detailed instructions for the future, but established the truths which as God He had revealed to man, giving to the disciples every power needed to enable them to pass on to the future all that He had taught them at the beginning. After the Coming of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost the tradition derived from our Lord opened out into what may be called the Faith in practice; the Church was now in action. This demanded a further development of the Christian tradition, while teaching and the observances which belonged to it spread abroad, and thus the Apostolic tradition passed on beyond the time of the Apostles through the ages to our own day—and will be continued by the Church until the end of time.

The Sacred Scriptures thus hold a very important place in the Apostolic tradition, and this tradition is the appointed means of passing on revealed truth from age to age in the Church. The "Apostolic" tradition is in the Tridentine Creed also called "Ecclesiastical" because it is essentially of the Church and in all its stages carries the authority of the Church. This ecclesiastical authorization distinguishes the true tradition from merely local churches or groups of Christians whose tradition has not been approved by competent authority.

"Observances and constitutions" are those which deal with the practice of the Catholic Religion. They include regulations concerning liturgical rites and ceremonies, discipline, moral questions, and other necessary questions of procedure.

"II. *I also accept the Sacred Scriptures according to that sense which Holy Mother Church has held and does hold, to whom it appertains to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures; neither will I ever take and interpret them otherwise than according to the unanimous consent of the Fathers.*"

This clause is directed against individual interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures. The Catholic Church has collected and preserved the books of the Old Testament and is responsible for the writing of the books of the New Testament. She therefore has the sole right to give an authoritative interpretation of them. Acceptance of the Tridentine Creed prohibits the interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures in any sense which is opposed to a doctrine defined by the Church, or to the teaching of the Fathers if it is a matter in which the Church has made no dogmatic definition. This clause of the Creed is directed against not only private interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures, but also against any interpretation put forward by local churches or groups of Christians who are not in visible communion with the Holy See.

"*IV. I embrace and receive all and every one of the things which have been defined and declared by the Holy Council of Trent concerning original sin and justification.*"

Under this clause are included the definitions of the Creed of Trent which were directed against the heresy of Luther, and especially his capital heresy of justification by faith only, according to which the value of good works is rejected, and the only means and assurance of justification in the sight of God is made to depend solely upon a purely inward conviction.

"*VI. I confess that under either kind alone the whole and entire Christ and a true sacrament is received.*"

The Tridentine Creed does not state that the sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood should *not* be received in both kinds, but that *if* It be received in one kind only it is the whole Christ which is received. If anything less than the whole Christ were received when the sacrament of His Body and Blood is received in one kind only, Christ would be divided, which is impossible. Moreover, if both the Body and Blood were not received in either species alone, the reception of the first species would be in the reception of the Body without the Blood, and this would be the reception not of the living Christ but of a dead Christ. It is theologically impossible to claim that anything less than the whole Christ is received in either kind without the other.

The objection has been raised that when our Lord said "Drink ye all of this" He laid a command upon every communicant for all time. But our Lord was instituting the sacrament of His Body and Blood, not laying down the procedure of communions for later days—this He left to the Church to regulate, just as He left many other things, e.g., fasting communion.

The Apostles drank from the sacred chalice in the upper room, but they were few in number and capable of doing so reverently with little risk of accident. But the Church in later days found that for the communion of large numbers of people, also for the communion of the sick and communion out of Mass generally, it was more reverent and convenient for communion to be given in one kind only, and since this could not entail any loss or limitation to the communicant, nor any theological significance different from that of communion in both kinds, it became established as a widespread custom. It has, however, never become universal. Communion in both kinds is still customary in the Uniate Oriental Churches in communion with the Holy See, and there are occasions upon which the deacon and subdeacon at High Mass in St. Peter's, Rome, receive in both kinds. As we have already noted, there is no theological significance in the difference between communion given in both kinds and communion given in one kind only. The whole Christ is received in either case, but communion in one kind meets various practical difficulties and avoids the risk of grave irreverence.

"*VIII. Likewise that the Saints reigning together with Christ are to be honoured and invoked, that they offer prayer to God for us, and that their relics are to be venerated.*"

"*IX. I most firmly assert that the images of Christ and of the Mother of God ever-Virgin and also of other Saints are to be had and retained, and that due honour and veneration are to be given to them.*"

This is not a command requiring the faithful to invoke the Saints, to venerate their relics, and to venerate images. Except in the public functions of the Church these practices are left to the discretion and devotion of the individual, but the Tridentine Creed here condemns the errors of those who reject as wrong the veneration of the Saints and the veneration of relics and of images.

"*X. I also affirm that the power of granting* **Indulgences** *was left by Christ in the Church, and that the use of them is most wholesome to Christian people.*"

Much confusion and error in regard to the doctrine of Indulgences is caused by ignorance; a large proportion of those who reject it do so because they have no clear idea of what an indulgence is.

Anyone who believes that Christ our Lord left to His Church the power to forgive sin must believe that He left also in the Church the power of granting indulgences. Original sin, and actual sin if mortal, deserve eternal punishment; but God in His mercy provides the remedy whereby the guilt of sin can be lifted; the soul is thus restored to a state of grace and eternal punishment is remitted. This remedy is given in the sacrament of baptism for original sin, and in the sacrament of penance for sins committed after baptism. But eternal punishment is not the only consideration. The fact that divine mercy can remove the sentence of eternal punishment does not do away with *all* punishment. Justice, and indeed love, demands that the sinner be willing to accept some degree of punishment in satisfaction for his sin. The eternal claims of justice and the loving response which man owes to the goodness of God would not be satisfied were we to reach heaven merely as reprieved felons. If we are to be free sons of God, worthy hereafter of His eternal favour, it is right that we should have paid as much as we can of our debt to the goodness of God and not have been let off such honourable satisfaction as it is within our power to make. Such satisfaction after the sin has been forgiven is called temporal punishment, i.e., punishment which is not everlasting. Sin thus incurs (a) guilt and (b) punishment. The guilt (in the case of sin after baptism) is through the divine mercy dealt with in the sacrament of penance; what remains of temporal punishment (after absolution) is also met by divine mercy. Temporal punishment can be remitted through the authority of the Church just as the guilt of the sin can be remitted through the same authority. The guilt can be remitted by absolution, and the temporal punishment by the granting of indulgences. The two remissions come from God through the authority given by Him to His Church. If we believe in the one we must believe in the other.

The meaning of the definition of an indulgence is now clear. "An indulgence is a remission, granted by the Church, of the temporal punishment which often remains due to sin after its guilt is forgiven." If this definition is carefully considered in the light of the above explanation, it will be seen that the erroneous objections to the doctrine of indulgences which are commonly made are wholly unfounded.

We are dealing here with the Tridentine Creed, not with the various applications of indulgences and the conditions upon which they may be gained. These are to be found in any manual of Catholic instruction and frequently in books of devotion. All that the Council of Trent states is that the power of indulgences exists in the Church and that the use of indulgences is "most wholesome."

It is well to keep these two bare statements well in mind, and to avoid springing to conclusions as to their presentment in practice. The bodily health of some people is furthered by a hearty breakfast, others are better served with coffee and a roll. Similarly the spiritual health of some may be assisted by a multiplicity of pious practices, whereas others do better on simpler fare. There can be room for both in the general sanctification of the Church on earth. But if truth is to retain its proper balance in the human mind, qualitative considerations must be kept uppermost and before questions of quantity and numbers. The number of the indulgences gained, or their frequency, is quite a secondary consideration. Heavenly truth is not made clearer by earthly computation. Wholesome thinking is necessarily wholesome practice. Let us not allow our ideas about indulgences to confuse or outrun the simple statement of the Tridentine Creed that the power of indulgences truly exists and that their use is most wholesome.

"*XI. I acknowledge the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Roman Church to be the Mother and Mistress of all Churches, and I promise true obedience to the Bishop of Rome, Successor of St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles, and Vicar of Jesus Christ.*"

The Roman Church is called the Mother of all Churches, because by Divine Providence she exercises a maternal influence and authority over them. The expression "Mother of all Churches" does not mean that the Roman Church actually gave birth to every local church: it is only some, not all of the local churches which owe their origin directly to the Apostolic See. But a mother's relationship with her children does not end with giving them birth: she must care for them and for their welfare according to their needs and capacities. Many of the fulfilments of motherhood are unique because nothing can adequately take their place. It is in this respect that the Roman Church is the Mother of all Churches; she possesses and bestows upon all local churches precisely that family status which guarantees their mutual relationship both with her and with one another.

The Church of the early ages of the Apostles was small and in one place. When Christianity began to spread, local assemblies of Christians, or churches, became necessary, and no such local church could be recognised as authentic unless it sprang from the original Church of the Apostles. Thus all local churches which are truly descended from the One True Church founded by Christ our Lord must recognise the Apostolic Church as their Mother. But is the "Roman" Church the same thing as the primitive Apostolic Church? It certainly is, and simply because St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, to whom our Lord gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven, founded the Roman Church when the Apostolic Church made its centre in Rome. Even non-Catholic historians now admit that St. Peter settled in Rome, and his successors are the successive Bishops of Rome.

The Holy Catholic and Apostolic Roman Church can have no rival as a Mother of Christians. No such rival indeed presents itself, for no other body of Christians can be said to make in practice such a claim. It being the function of a mother to care for the welfare of her children, the Roman Church provides for this in a manner and degree which belongs to no other body of Christians. The Roman system of jurisdiction and legislation which covers the day-to-day needs of the faithful is such as could embrace the whole world, if everyone were to give adherence to the Holy See.

We may now ask why the Roman Church is not only the Mother but also the Mistress of all Churches. The term "Mistress" here means that the Roman Church has authority over all Churches. About this both theology and history have much to say; but we will here confine ourselves to a brief outline which will explain the underlying truth of the Church's authority.

Unless there is some ultimate authority in matters of faith and morals, different people will interpret them in different ways.

But the fact that people can and do disagree does not affect the truth about God and the things of God. Divine truth remains what it is whatever people choose to think about it. It would still be true even if there were no living human being on the earth to believe it.

If there is a God who has revealed Himself to man, there must be a means whereby that revelation can be known with accuracy. Divine revelation would not fulfil its purpose if its apprehension by man produced nothing better than the vagaries of human opinion. The truths which God has revealed to us in Christ our Lord must in some way be taught in this world with an authority which can preserve them from error. Such authority has been given to the Church on earth by our Lord Himself, in the Papacy; or to be more exact in the infallibility in matters concerning faith and morals with which He has endowed St. Peter and his successors.

We must not misunderstand what is meant by Papal infallibility. It means that when the Pope speaks *ex cathedra* (i.e. officially) to the whole Church concerning faith or morals, he is protected from error by a Divine assistance specially given by our Lord to St. Peter and his successors in the Papacy. In this the Pope is the Vicar or accredited representative of

Christ on earth. But Papal infallibility does *not* mean that other utterances of the Holy Father are infallible, except in so far as they involve matter which is infallible by reason of a previous *ex cathedra* definition. Apart from *ex cathedra* definitions concerning faith and morals a Pope can err like other men.

If we wish to inquire into the truth of the dogma of Papal infallibility we shall find that a number of considerations throw light upon it. Several passages in the Gospels shew that our Lord gave to St. Peter a position of primacy over the other Apostles. Clearly there is great significance in our Lord's words, "Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." Also, "Simon, Simon, behold Satan has desired to have you (plural, i.e. all of you) that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for *thee* (singular) that *thy* faith fail not; and when *thou* art converted, strengthen thy brethren." This was followed later by the commission "Feed my sheep." Other texts can also be quoted which are to the same purpose. The "rock" referred to may have been Christ Himself, or Peter's Confession of Christ, or Peter who thus confessed Christ. In the writings of the Fathers all three interpretations are to be found; St. Augustine at different times favoured two of the three views. We need not decide between them, but it is none-the-less clear that upon this occasion our Lord bestowed a unique commission upon St. Peter, and the nature and scope of that commission becomes increasingly clear so as to leave no doubt as to its meaning.

History bears witness that the Pope in his *ex cathedra* teaching has preserved the integrity of the faith. The Papacy is the only institution which has never varied in its presentment of the essential truths of Christianity despite conflicting opinions. Some of the Popes have been saints, others quite the opposite, but their official teaching has never departed from the One Faith. The Divine origin of the Papacy is a matter of faith, and history corroborates the fulfilment of the infallibility in faith and morals with which Christ has endowed His Vicar on earth.

But what of the Roman claim to authority in those day-to-day affairs of the Church which are *not* within the scope of Papal infallibility? The exercise of such authority is clearly for the well-being of the Church in the many affairs which need careful ordering. The faithful in visible communion with the Holy See, have everything to gain by this authority (called the ordinary magisterium), even if mistakes sometimes occur in the working as may be expected in an imperfect world. But there is another case to be considered, viz. that of those who accept all that is contained in the Creed of the Council of Trent and yet believe themselves to be prevented from "becoming Roman Catholics" in the full sense of visible communion with the Holy See. There are e.g. some who are called Anglicans who are "Anglican" in nothing whatever except that they receive sacraments which depend on Anglican ordinations; they are Roman Catholics in everything except that they are not officially recognized by the juridical authorities of the Roman Church, and this because they believe *ex animo* that Anglican ordinations are valid,

whereas Rome rejects that belief. It is admitted that the Roman rejection of the validity of Anglican ordinations is not an infallible decision of the Holy See, but the deadlock entailed keeps those in question outside the visible Roman unity. Are they, in the terms of the Tridentine Creed, able to say that they "promise true obedience to the Bishop of Rome, Successor of St Peter, Prince of the Apostles, and Vicar of Jesus Christ"? Assuredly they may do so in intention even though their avowal is not received by the Roman Church. They cannot in conscience do less. It is deplorable that they should be deprived of the full benefits of the Church's ordinary magisterium, but they are within the Church's unity of baptism and her unity of faith, and, under their claim to the validity of Anglican ordinations, they are within her unity of worship also, though they are outside her unity of government. This deprivation, while its cause remains a matter of conscience does not impair their hope of salvation. They are not wilful rebels who have individually broken away, but unfortunates who find themselves unwillingly involved in a disciplinary deadlock which they did not create. Disciplinary conditions produce a deadlock between truth and unity—between a question of truth (Anglican ordinations) in the realm of conscience, and a question of unity in the realm of government; and the Roman moralists are agreed that conscience must always be obeyed. Moreover, since the Tridentine Creed affirms (Section III) that "Confirmation and Order cannot be repeated without sacrilege," it must follow that a person who has received one or both of these sacraments from an Anglican bishop cannot in conscience submit to their repetition from any source, so long as he believes them to be valid. The deadlock continues, but it does not relieve those concerned from the duty of desiring to render obedience to the Vicar of Christ and the authority of the Roman Church, and of not merely desiring but actually rendering such obedience as far as is practicable in a state of exclusion from the visible unity of government.

> "*XII. I likewise undoubtingly receive and profess all other things which the Sacred Canons and general Councils and particularly the holy Council of Trent and the Oecumenical Vatican Council have delivered, defined and declared, and especially concerning the supremacy and infallible authority of the Roman Pontiff. And I condemn, reject and anathematize all things contrary thereto, and all heresies which the Church has condemned, rejected and anathematized.*"

Under the heading of "general Councils" are comprised the first seven general Councils recognized by East and West, and the thirteen subsequent Councils recognized by the Western Church only. The Vatican Council took place (in 1869) after the Tridentine Creed was first formulated. Mention of it was added later to the Creed because, like the

other nineteen, it was an Oecumenical Council. We have already in these explanations shewn why we should accept Councils which are peculiarly "Roman." These Councils, with the exception of Trent, which had not yet brought its labours to a close at the beginning of the so-called Reformation in England (16th century), were all accepted by the pre-Reformation Church in England. The post-Reformation "Church of England" has never been capable of speaking with authority because of its separation from the Holy See. But those Anglicans who claim to accept the essential truths of the Christian religion as taught by the Holy See must accept *all* the general Councils, including those peculiarly Roman, because in so doing they are using the one complete and adequate means of dissociating themselves from those evils which they deplore in the post-Reformation "Church of England," and at the same time linking themselves with the faith of the pre-Reformation Church in England. In addition to the dogmatic definitions of these Councils there are their disciplinary measures and the Sacred Canons referred to in this clause of the Tridentine Creed. Here we must make a distinction between the pre-Reformation Canon Law and that which has been promulgated since. The later Canon Law is promulgated for the visible Roman Communion and has not been promulgated outside it. But even those who, though not in visible communion with the Holy See, yet accept the teaching of the Holy See in faith and morals, must, to be consistent, accept the principle of Roman Canon Law and such of its enactments as are applicable in their state of isolation. Otherwise there is nothing which is consistent with their acceptance of Catholic belief to guide them in matters of Catholic discipline and other procedure.

The Tridentine Creed ends thus:—

> "*I do now freely profess and sincerely hold this true Catholic Faith without which no-one can be saved, and I promise most firmly to hold and profess the same whole and entire with the help of God to my life's end.*"

"Without which no-one can be saved" means that anyone who has once received the light of the Catholic Faith cannot be saved without it i.e. if such a person, having had it, deliberately rejects it. This clause has no reference to those who have not had the opportunity to receive the full light of the Catholic Religion, but in good faith are living up to such light as they have. Many have not the means of knowing the Catholic Faith; they will not be judged by God for being without that which they have had no opportunity to obtain. Our Lord said "he that believeth not shall be condemned" (Mark xvi. 16), but this applies only to those who have had the opportunity of believing, and knowing what they were rejecting have wilfully and deliberately rejected it.